

**Remarks of Mayor Paul D. Fraim
NATO Fest Flag-Raising Ceremony
60th Annual Festival
Friday, April 27, 2012
4:30 PM**

Delegate Hester, General Paloméros, General Bieniek, Festival Ambassador Atkins, Festival Chair Alex Pincus, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. Good afternoon, and welcome to the Opening Ceremony of the 60th Annual Norfolk NATO Festival.

On behalf of City Council and the citizens of Norfolk, it is an honor to represent the City at today's Flag Raising Ceremony - the traditional kick-off for the Festival.

Once again, this year's festival honors all NATO nations, and I want to take this opportunity to thank every one of them for their commitment to the principles of freedom and the preservation of peace and security, and for their support and participation in the Festival's many events.

This year's Festival marks a special occasion and one that we are proud to commemorate, the 60th year Norfolk has served as NATO's North American headquarters.

NATO was established in 1949 and ever since then the Alliance has withstood the tensions of a changing world, and maintained international stability while protecting and nurturing the growth of democracy.

It has done so by adapting to new challenges that have emerged to threaten democracy and free societies, and through expansion of its membership to include additional nations.

We appreciate the great amounts of dedication, hard work, and sacrifices made by the men and women serving their respective countries - so thank you for all you do. The need for the Alliance today is as great as, or greater than, it has ever been.

As home to the largest naval base in the world and with our longstanding military heritage, Norfolk citizens understand more than most the importance of military service and the sacrifices made by those who serve, and so we are very proud to be home of the Alliance's North American Headquarters.

It is this sense of pride and distinction that led us to organize this festival in 1953, the year after NATO's Allied Command was established here. Since then, Norfolk has held this annual tribute during the month of NATO's founding as a way of recognizing and honoring the allied forces.

The Norfolk NATO Festival, formally known as the International Azalea Festival, has come to be recognized as one of the nation's preeminent international civic celebrations. Norfolk NATO Festival is the longest continuously running Festival in the Hampton Roads region, and the only one of its kind in the United States which honors the NATO Alliance and its member nations.

Today, it would be hard to imagine Norfolk without this annual rite of spring. I suspect if you asked someone in 1953 if they thought the event would be going strong 60 years later – I'm not sure many would have guessed that it would.

Our City is fiercely proud of our military heritage - a heritage that stretches back to the founding of our nation. We are equally proud of the role we have played and continue to play in defense of our nation and in defense of freedom around the world. There are few communities that can say they have had this privilege.

Over the next few days, citizens from across the region will be attending the many special events that are a part of the Norfolk NATO Festival, such as the Virginia International Tattoo and the Annual Parade of Nations.

We greatly value the opportunities afforded by the NATO Festival to advance and promote the importance of cultural exchanges and international friendships between our citizens and representatives of Alliance member nations.

So on behalf of all of us, I extend best wishes to the NATO nations and to everyone involved in helping make this year's Norfolk NATO Festival a great experience.

Thank you.